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03-06-09

Period 4

AP Language and Composition

As I read about the local science competition, the announcement tells us that instead of one winner, the top ten percent of us would receive “first award.” Quickly, I lose motivation for the status of best in science. In a world of competitive activities, sports, and business, contests are present throughout our lives. Whether in the realm of physical activities or a science fair, students and adults alike are competing for ultimate goal – number one. In the educational system, this competition is just as important as the rest of life’s challenges. High schools have been ranking their students since the mid 1800’s, and since that time, these schools have given the titles of valedictorian and salutatorian to first and second in the class.

What exactly is class rank? At Fairview, class rank is a compilation of numeric grades and weighting of classes. However, ranking procedure varies from school to school. While procedures differ across the country for ranking, the concept remains the same – students are ranked according to academic achievement. This placing of students in academic order is used for one main purpose - college application. Some high school counselors insist on not releasing class rank to colleges. Consequently, some college application officers are irritated because they have to focus on other aspects of the student, such as extracurricular activities and standardized testing. Although 40% of high schools neglect ranking when sending students’ transcripts, college deans attempt to “recreate” ranking among their applicants. Class rank enables colleges to see how the student compares with their peers in academic accomplishment.

The competitive nature of class rank has been praised and disapproved. However, many students find motivation in competing for the number one spot. By displaying the ultimate prize as valedictorian, students are encouraged to achieve academic potential. For example, in a high school grade, the top students are going to study and work extremely diligently for the status of number one. With a percentile system, students find less motivation to be in the top “tier” than having the fame of being valedictorian. Abolishing any kind of ranking system discourages students entirely. As former President Hoover said, “Competition… is the incentive to progress.”

Critics of a ranking system insist that the competition level is unhealthy and hurts student relations. However, do these critics censure competitive sports? In individual sports, such as cross country, swimming, and track, athletes do not sabotage and antagonize their teammates to gain an advantage. The purpose of these sports is to be the best, and academics function similarly. As Jessica Idiculla, a recently graduated valedictorian states “We're high school kids. We need some kind of guidance. We do need rules and we do need things, something tangible for us to obtain.” Much like sports, the concrete award of valedictorian encourages students. School and athletics parallel in the nature of competitiveness and how it can foster students’ potential for success.

Overall, I thoroughly believe that the class ranking fosters healthy competition among America’s youth. Without competition, high schools only encourage laziness and apathy. Class rank is used for college application, the most significant purpose of high school. Without class rank, American high schools breed uncompetitive students in a viciously combative world. While opponents of class rank argue it fosters unhealthy competition, a myriad of other activities encourage competition among students. Class rank only motivates students to compete and reach their highest potential in academics.